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HENRY TIMROD:

Man and Poet

A CRITICAL STUDY

BY

GEORGE ARMSTRONG WAUCHOPE

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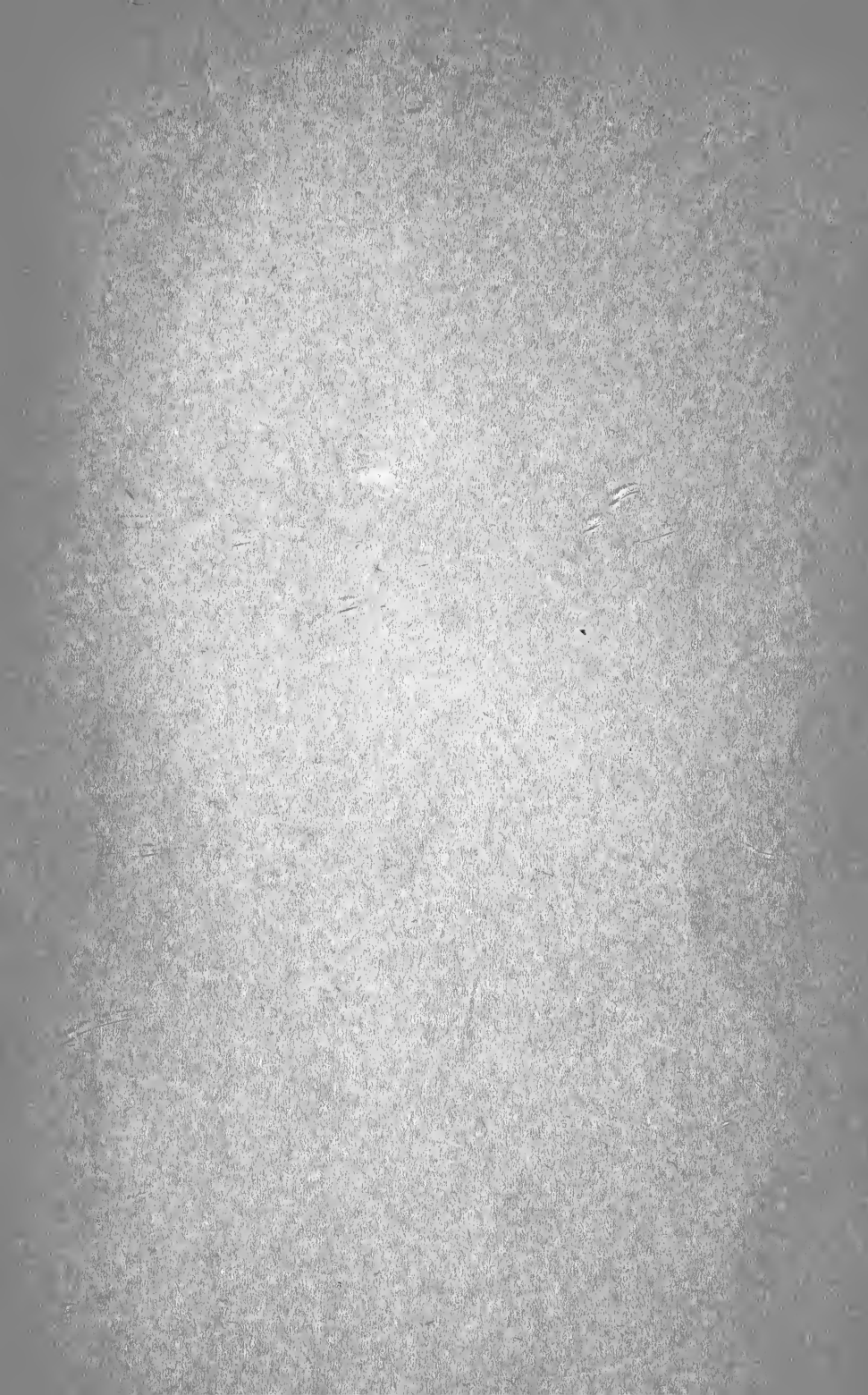
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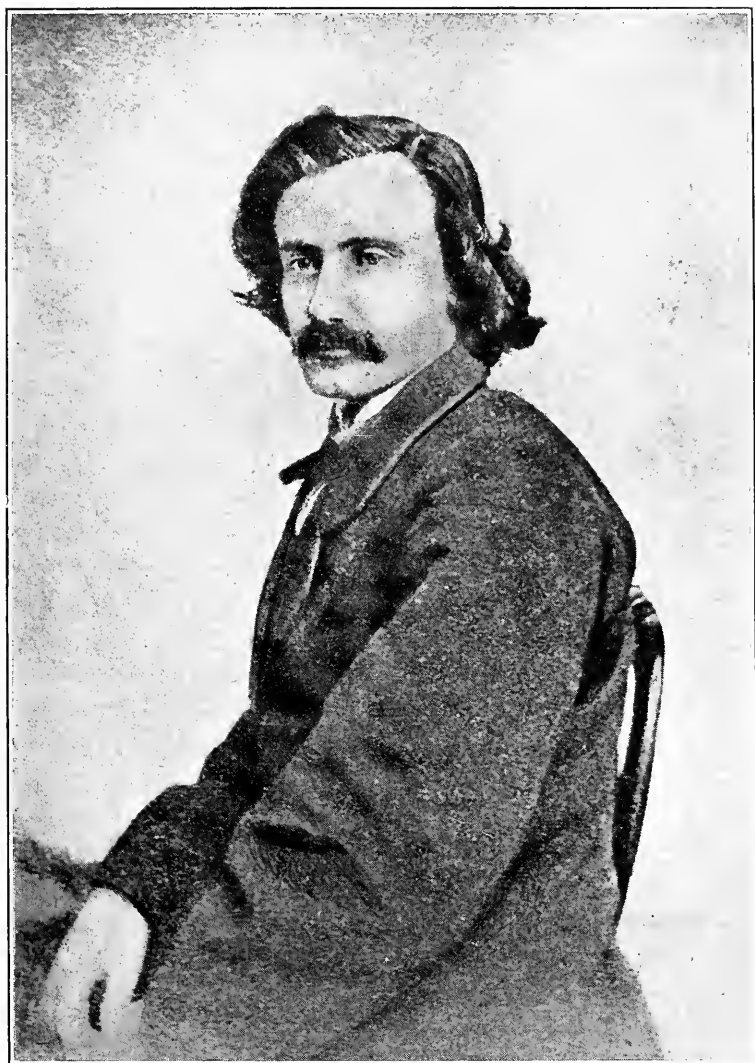
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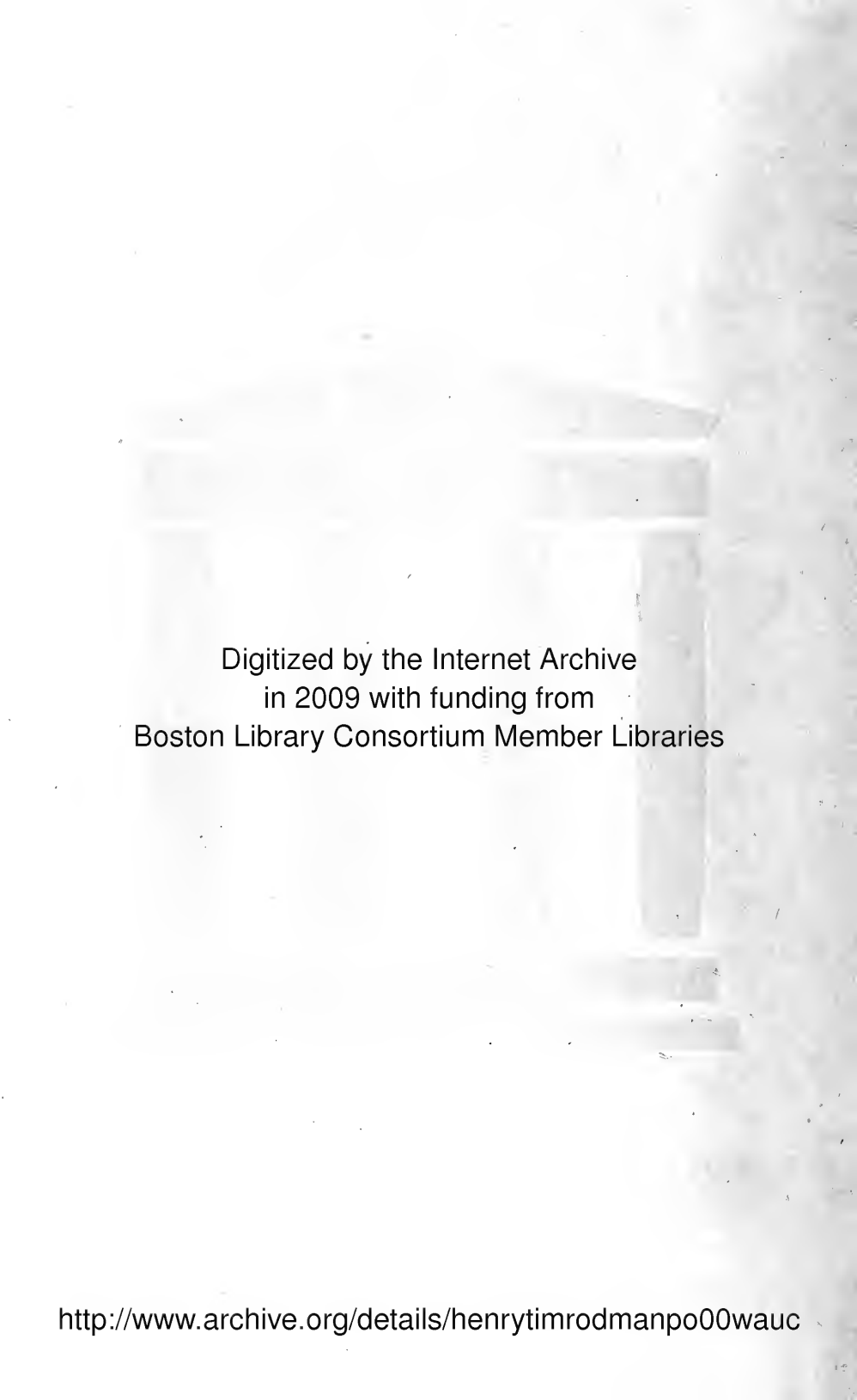
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HENRY TIMROD
(From a rare photograph)



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PREFACE.

This monograph is the outgrowth of an address given at Columbia College in this city in 1898. It was first published in *The North Carolina Review*, May, 1912. Much of the original material was gathered in Charleston, where I had the opportunity of learning some unpublished facts about Timrod's life and of gaining a personal impression of the man from several who knew him intimately.

My chief indebtedness is to the late William A. Courtenay, for the use of his rare collection of Timrodiana. My thanks are also due to my colleague, Doctor Yates Snowden, for the loan of a pamphlet containing a record of the work of the Timrod Memorial Association. From it are taken the three illustrations here reproduced.

GEORGE ARMSTRONG WAUCHOPE.

*University of South Carolina,
May 12, 1915.*

Henry Timrod: Man and Poet

I

The Charleston School

The more one becomes acquainted with the books on American literature by Northern critics, the more one realizes from the disproportion of space given to the South as compared with that assigned to the North that literary appreciation must begin at home. It is not a discredit to New England that her most insignificant poetaster has received painstaking though ill-deserved critical consideration; is it to the credit of the South that some of her greatest writers are little more than names north of Mason and Dixon's line?

The Charleston group of writers, which numbered among its members William Gilmore Simms, Henry Timrod, Paul Hamilton Hayne, John Dickson Bruns, Samuel Henry Dickson, John B. Irving, Mitchell King, James L. Petigru, Langdon Cheves, and James Mathewes Legare, forms a long-neglected but important chapter in the literary history of the Nation. This notable circle that met at Russell's book-shop on King's street, published a remarkable succession of magazines, that furnish in their pages the best tangible evidence of the intellectual activity of that section, and may be accepted by the literary historian as a fairly accurate gauge of the quality as well as the quantity of its literary output. A surprisingly large mass of "mere literature" was produced in Charleston, and it now calls for as close and detailed study as that which has been given the Knickerbocker School or the Hartford Wits. Until our own critics have done their duty, and some like Baskervil, Henneman, Trent, Holliday, Link, Kent, Smith, and Mims have not been idle, all the fault cannot be laid at the door of Northern

writers if, as in a well-known "Literary History of America" five hundred pages are lavished upon authors of the other sections, while only thirty-five are vouchsafed to Southern writers, fifteen of which are given to Poe, two each to Simms and Timrod, and one to Hayne. In literature the proverb of the prophet not without honor is reversed, and the moral of the old fable of the man bestride the lion holds good. Each section must first discover and show a proper appreciation of her own men of genius, and then national and even international attention will surely follow. Then we shall have no more chapters in "American Literature" declaring that writers are as scarce in the South as the proverbial snakes in Ireland.

II

The Timrod Revival

It is a fact, however unpleasant and unsatisfactory, that all literary reputations remain in unstable equilibrium for at least a century. The mills of the critics grind slowly, and the poor author runs the gauntlet of unjust neglect or of mere popularity which is uncertain and often unreliable. Fifteen years ago it was customary to speak of Henry Timrod as an obscure American poet, an attitude which is rapidly passing. The Timrod revival of 1899, the date of the publication of the memorial edition of his poems, has resulted in a series of appreciative studies, which are in turn speedily bringing about a more general recognition throughout the nation of his high merit as a lyric poet. Just at present he seems to be ranked in the same group with Bryant, Whittier, Holmes, and Hayne, but hardly in the same class with Poe, Longfellow, Whitman, and Lanier. Several short biographical or critical sketches of Timrod have appeared, generally as introductions to various editions of his poems, but as yet no definitive "Life" has appeared. It is to be hoped that before another decade passes an authoritative biography of Timrod will be written for "The American Men of Letters Series." Already we have waited too long for

this service to be rendered to the memory of him whom so competent a critic as Mr. Hamilton W. Mabie has declared to be "one of the most attractive figures and most pathetic in the brief history of our literature, one of the truest lyric poets that has yet appeared in the country, the most characteristic Southern poet."

III

Ancestry and Youth

It is not my purpose in this study to recount in detail the tragic but romantic life of Henry Timrod. Its outer aspects were hard, depressing, and pathetic; but his inner life, taking into account the many inequalities of his sensitive, highly artistic temperament, seems to have been one, perhaps beyond the average. The internal evidence of the poems, as well as his essays and editorials, reveal the joyous spirit of the man, and we know that he was happy in his friendship with such men as Hayne, Simms, Bryant, Tupper, Bruns, Courtenay, Orr, and Hampton, who entertained for him a feeling of genuine affection and admiration. He was equally fortunate and happy in his friendship with many of the lovely daughters of South Carolina, with no fewer than twelve of whom, according to one who knew him intimately, his youthful fancy was charmed into a feeling somewhat warmer than friendship. In his sentimental regard and reverence for woman Burns was his prototype.

The life of Timrod was no less eventful than short and ill-fated. It is the story of a sensitive, highstrung young man, in whose career the threads of comedy and tragedy are blended, a life whose dark silhouette is projected against the red scenic background of a land devastated by civil war, a life in which we find little to censure, more to sympathize with, and much to praise.

The student of the mysterious law of heredity need not go farther back than two generations to account for the personality of the poet. When in May, 1775, the noise of "the shot heard round the world" reached and rever-

berated through the narrow streets of Charleston, the first volunteer to sign the muster-roll of the Fusileers was a young patriot of German birth named Henry Timrod. He afterwards married a Miss Graham, a gifted and well-educated young lady of Scotch-Irish descent. Their son, a book-binder, in Charleston, Captain William Henry Timrod, led his company of volunteers against the Seminole Indians in the war of 1836, in which he contracted a fatal disease. He was a man of marked literary tastes, and his shop became the resort of many gentlemen of wealth and culture who enjoyed his eloquent and original conversation. This young "provincial Coleridge" edited a magazine and published a volume of verse, one of which entitled "To Time, the Old Traveler" is preserved in several anthologies. He married a Miss Prince of Swiss descent, a young lady endowed not only with great beauty but with personal charm and with a passionate love of nature. This couple were the parents of our great Southern poet.

Timrod was born in Charleston on December 8, 1829. "To have been his birthplace," said Longfellow, "is a distinct honor." Here he received his early training and his preparation for college in private schools. One of his schoolmates was the eminent philologist, Dr. Basil L. Gildersleeve, now of the Johns Hopkins University, himself a gifted man of letters. His deskmate and lifelong friend was Paul Hamilton Hayne, who was destined to become an equally distinguished and more fortunate brother poet. "I well remember," says Hayne, "the exultation with which he showed me one morning his earliest consecutive attempt at verse-making. Our down-east schoolmaster, however, could boast of no turn for sentiment, and having remarked us hobnobbing, meanly assaulted us in the rear, effectually quenching, for the time, all æsthetic enthusiasm."

Harry, or Hal, as he was called by his fellows, is remembered as diffident, impulsive, ambitious. To a heart warm with affectionate impulses he united a mind that thirsted for knowledge. He was also a lover of

outdoor sports, and took vigorous exercise in running, leaping, wrestling, swimming, boxing, and even in fighting. He rejoiced greatly in the weekly holiday and spent it in "long rambles through wood and field." His constitution, however, was of almost feminine delicacy, and even at this early age, a hectic flush on his cheek gave premonition of a consumptive tendency.

At seventeen Timrod entered the University of Georgia. He was in no sense a leader or popular among his classmates, who recognized slight ability in the poor, shy, and reticent student. To them he was only a dreamer, all too devoted to the classics and English poetry, and forever falling in love and composing tender or frantic verses to each successive charmer. No one has uttered so fitting a word on this period as the popular Charleston novelist, Miss Annie L. Sloan, who remarks: "During his university days he lived through the stage of wandering and adolescent fancy mistaken for love by its inexperienced victims. *The Charleston Evening News* published many of his love-songs, each one inspired perhaps by a passing pretty face. And as there is an adolescent fancy that writes, so is there one that reads, and thus these impassioned raptures of an unfledged poet gained great popularity." After two years Timrod was compelled to leave college, partly on account of delicate health and partly for lack of means. But he had already laid the foundation of academic culture, formed the habits of a scholar, and acquired a genuine love of literature.

IV

Timrod as Teacher

On his return to his native city ill-equipped by nature and an incomplete education for the struggle for existence, Timrod decided to read law, and was admitted into the office of the eminent jurist, James L. Petigru. Though he was following a custom well-nigh universal among ambitious young gentlemen of that time, never was step more ill-advised, never was profession more uncongenial.

"Timrod was too wholly a poet," says Judge Bryan, "to keep company long with so relentless, rugged, and exacting a mistress as the law." Here for once was the fiery Pegasus with wings clipped harnessed to a legal dray. Petigru once sent Timrod with a message to a business firm on the Bay. When he had gone half the distance he discovered to his dismay that in a fit of absent-mindedness he had forgotten the message. He returned to the office, and in a shame-faced way confessed his want of attention. His punishment was a crushing rebuke, delivered in Petigru's high-pitched voice, "Why, Harry, you are a fool!" "I would have been a fool," said Timrod, "to Mr. Petigru to the end of my days, even had I revealed in after-life the genius of a Milton or Shakespeare."

Having abandoned the law, Timrod now renewed his classical studies with a view to teaching. He at first sought a professorship in some college but finding no position available, he accepted a situation as tutor. During the ten years preceding the Civil War he was a teacher, part of the time serving as assistant in Hugh Train's school in Bluffton, South Carolina, and afterwards as private tutor in the families of a Mr. Lowndes near Charleston, of Murray Robinson near Orangeburg, and other South Carolina planters. To the daughter of Mr. Robinson, then Miss Felicia, to whom the poet wrote "Preceptor Amat," I am indebted for some personal recollections of her tutor.

"I remember Mr. Timrod well," she writes, "with all the present impressions of childhood. With us he was like a member of our family, making himself such by his unobtrusive, gentle nature, and by the deep interest which he always took in our affairs. He was very considerate, sympathetic and affectionate in disposition. I have heard him spoken of as a 'crank,' which is unjust. He was very absent-minded, and was often so absorbed in poetical fancies that he would appear peculiar. He spent as much of his time as his duties would allow in reading and studying, and was rarely without some book in his hand. Tennyson and Wordsworth were his favorites, I think, as he carried

old worn copies in his pockets. He was a very learned man, being devoted to the classics, and able to read fluently French, German, Latin and Greek." In the matter of scholarship Timrod had one qualification of an efficient teacher, but he was not successful on account of absent-mindedness, and lack of system and discipline. He would often forget to hear the children's lessons, and as often neglect to listen to their recitations. On such occasions he would start up suddenly from his reverie and say, "Now begin!" He taught at Mr. Robinson's several years, and afterwards returned as a frequent and welcomed guest. "These woods and grounds," he would say, "seem to help me to think," and several of his best poems were composed amid those congenial surroundings.

Several who knew Timrod personally have given me their recollections of his appearance, and from these bits of evidence and from his portraits we may reconstruct a composite picture of the man in his prime. In size he was considerably below the medium, but he had the noble head of a poet. His neck was short, and on this account he always wore a turned-down collar, but his superb head was borne proudly erect on square shoulders. His features were regular, his hands and feet small and exquisitely shaped. He dressed habitually in a neat black suit, but was often compelled to wear his clothes, especially his shoes, until they were in need of repair. His brow was low and broad and marked the thinker, his chin was weak but finely molded. His pale complexion was set off by full dark hair, fine teeth, irresolute, sensitive lips, a heavy brown mustache, and large gray eyes, which though slightly melancholy in repose flashed with excitement and sparkled with mirth under their long curling lashes. His voice was a deep rich bass, very soft and musical. He was afflicted with nightblindness and had to be piloted around after dark.

While Timrod was teaching in Mr. Train's school the following incident occurred: It was customary for the little assistant to send the unruly spirits in his room to the headmaster for punishment. The latter was a large and

powerful man, whose left arm, on account of some stiffness in his shoulder-joint, stood out as rigid as a bar of iron. A big bully, having been sent up by Timrod to Mr. Train for a whipping, declared his intention to take dire vengeance on his tutor. Timrod started out that afternoon on his usual walk to the brow of a hill to watch the sunset. He was followed at some distance by Mr. Train, who suspected trouble. Hardly had the poet reached the end of his walk when the bully sprang out of some bushes with a long stick, and livid with rage, roared out, "You, sir, were the cause of my getting a thrashing this morning, but there's going to be the — est thrashing now that ever you saw!" Just as he was on the point of attacking Timrod, however, he suddenly felt himself in the clutches of that terrible, derrick-like arm and heard the voice of Mr. Train thundering, "You are quite right, sir, there is going to be the — est thrashing ever heard of, but you are the scoundrel that's going to get it!"

Timrod was essentially social in his nature, and the monotonous life on the plantations caused him to feel his isolation deeply. He must have intuitively realized that the very breath and inspiration of his literary work depended upon his association with kindred spirits. When the holidays came, he would rush joyfully away from his dull routine, like a boy released from school, down to his beloved Charleston, where he would be welcomed with the utmost cordiality by his old comrades. He cared not at all for money, and as long as he had any, he spent it with a free hand though generously. He once came down to Charleston with \$300 in his pocket, but quickly ran through with it all. The next day his friend Lowndes happened to meet him on the street, and observed that he was deeply depressed. The poet looked very unhappy and was roundly abusing himself as follows. "Like a fool, I have squandered my last dollar, — my idiotic soul! literally thrown it away, — my idiotic soul!" Timrod was a man of Celtic temperament and convivial tastes, and in the company of those he loved and trusted, his spirits expanded in ecstasy over the treacherous cup, and too

often it must be confessed he fell a victim to the besetting sin of Burns, Poe and Lamb. After such lapses, Timrod would feel the pangs of remorse, which would sometimes take the tangible form of a desire to join the Order of the Rechabites or some other temperance society. But let us cast a mantle of charity over the common human weakness of the poet.

Between the years 1848 and 1853 the young teacher was feeling his way toward literature, and was gradually winning his spurs in his true vocation. He assumed the pen-name of Aglaus, a Greek pastoral poet, and soon became a regular contributor to the *Southern Literary Messenger*, the ablest magazine in the South, then edited by the accomplished John R. Thompson. In the number for April, 1851, appeared the beautiful ode which was written for the dedication of Magnolia Cemetery. The editor took this occasion to reveal the identity of his "esteemed correspondent."

In 1859-1860 the first volume of his poems was published in Boston, and though the time could hardly have been more unpropitious, it was favorably received.

V

Last Years and Death

Timrod was one of the myriad victims of the Civil War. His unworldliness, his lack of business sense, his poverty, actually proved a serious handicap even in the piping times of peace and rendered his career unsuccessful and precarious. But from the day of the fatal shot at Fort Sumter, his frail skiff, at best unseaworthy even on quite waters, drifted piteously and in sore distress on a tempestuous ocean which engulfed the stoutest ships.

At the outbreak of hostilities, he acted for a time as private secretary to Col. L. M. Keith on James Island. He volunteered at one time as a private in the army, but did not see service. He was next sent to the Army of the West as war correspondent of the *Charleston Mercury*. He returned from this fiery ordeal with shattered nerves

and wrecked constitution, barely escaping from the maelstrom of retreat with his life. He then struggled along in his native city till early in 1864 when he moved to Columbia, where he became associate editor of *The South Carolinian*. Having now the prospect of permanent employment, he consummated his dearest wish by marrying Miss Goodwin, the English "Katie" of his poems. His journalistic duties were varied and exacting, and though the work was uncongenial, he performed the day's tasks steadily, patiently, cheerfully, for he was earning bread for his loved ones.

In battle, the trumpeter may perform a greater service than any man on the firing-line. Timrod could not carry a musket for the land he loved, but he did something better and far more valuable. He filled a part which few men in the grand army of the South could have filled. He was the trumpet of the Confederacy, and no sooner had the news of secession flashed over the land than his bugle note was heard loud and clear in "Carolina," "Charleston," "Ethnogenesis," "A Call to Arms" and other martial lyrics that aroused a responsive throb of patriotism in ten thousand hearts.

The climax of Timrod's misfortunes came in February, 1865. Columbia was captured, despoiled, and burned by Sherman's army. The little editor escaped, but soon returned from hiding to his desolate home to find his business wiped out of existence, and sickness, beggary, and starvation staring him in the face. His life became a pitiful, unmitigated tragedy. In October he lost his only son, and in his Willie's little grave a large portion of the father's heart was buried. The poet was in despair, and sought in vain for work. For a time his devoted sister, Mrs. Goodwin, kept the wolf from the door by the sale of her furniture and silver plate. Timrod was promised \$15 a week to write daily editorials for the *Charleston Carolinian*, performed the task for four months, but never received a cent. As a forlorn hope he carefully copied some of his poems and offered them to a Northern magazine. They were coldly declined. In his agony he declared



The Cottage, 1104 Henderson Street, Columbia, S. C., where Timrod spent the last years of his life, and died October 6, 1867

that he would have consigned every line he had ever written to eternal oblivion for one hundred dollars in hand.

General Wade Hampton having learned of the dire need of the poet, offered him a sum of money. Stung with pride, Timrod at first declined to accept it. Then the general pressing the offer as an old friend prevailed. Grasping his benefactor's hand, Timrod exclaimed with tears in his eyes, "General, I take it as from God!"

The one bright spot in his last days was the visit to Copse Hill, the cabin-home of his best friend Hayne. That pleasant August among the fragrant Georgia pines, upon which the wind like a mighty minstrel harped the poet's requiem, was a blessed haven of peace and calm to his weary, buffeted soul. "Unmerciful disaster followed fast and followed faster," but here he found at the last milestone of his life's journey a sheltering hospitality and a more than brotherly affection.

On his return to Columbia hemorrhage followed hemorrhage, and in spite of tender ministrations of loved ones and neighbors, his vital force ebbed away. On October 6, 1867, in the early hush of that Sabbath morn, the dying poet commemorated for the first time the love and sufferings of his ascended Lord. Then began the mystery of dissolution, the poet watching curiously the struggle of life and death. "It appears like two tides," he whispered, "two tides advancing and retreating, these powers of life and death." To his sister's comforting words, "You will soon be at rest now," he replied, "Yes, my sister, but love is sweeter than rest." He was unable to swallow the last spoonful of water which his wife gave him to quench his burning thirst. "Never mind," he said, "I shall soon drink at the river of eternal life." Thus at the age of thirty-eight, breathing regrets over his unfinished work, some proofsheets of which were stained with his lifeblood, the weary sufferer sank to rest, as he had sung:

Somewhere on this earthly planet
In the dust of flowers to be,
In the dewdrop, in the sunshine,
Sleeps a solemn day for me.

In a dim and murky chamber,
I am breathing life away;
Some one draws a curtain softly,
And I watch the broadening day.

As it purples in the zenith,
As it brightens on the lawn,
There's a hush of death about me,
And a whisper, "He is gone!"

Timrod's grave in Trinity churchyard in Columbia is marked by a boulder of gray granite erected in 1901. In Washington Square, in Charleston, stands a handsome monument to the poet, one of the panels of which bears this inscription: "Through clouds and through sunshine, in peace and in war, amid the stress of poverty and the storms of civil strife, his soul never faltered, and his purpose never failed. To his poetic mission he was faithful to the end. In life and in death he was not disobedient unto the heavenly vision."

VI

Lack of Appreciation

The familiar charges that Timrod was a coward, a drone, a weakling, "a timid little creature crouching before a dread unknown," a hen-pecked boy, may be dismissed as absolutely unsustained by the facts of his life. Even the story that he died of starvation has been effectually refuted. Before the Civil War, he led the happy-go-lucky life of a poor and unworldly young man, engaged successively as tutor, journalist, and secretary. He was a victim of the war, and shared the struggles and hardships of his impoverished people. He was unable to rise on account of his natural diffidence, his life-long poverty, the want of a

literary market, the disasters incident to war, and the fatal tuberculosis which was the immediate cause of his premature death.

His posthumous reputation also suffered from a number of causes, chief among which were—the general lack of interest in poetry in a material age, the poverty of his admirers at home, the lack of an audience in the North, due to sectional prejudice against him as a Confederate war poet, and the lack of cheap popular editions of his works.

Timrod was not a prolific writer. His total poetic output amounted to only about five thousand lines, or a thin 16mo volume of two hundred pages. His best work, like that of Blake, Chatterton, Blair, and other “inheritors of unfulfilled renown,” would be comprised in a little book of less than fifty pages. So precious and indispensable is it, however, that were it preserved in manuscript, like the Gothic Bible in Upsala, it should be bound in silver with a clasp of gold.

VII

The Poet of Nature

Timrod's poems may be conveniently grouped in the order of their importance and technical excellence as lyrics of war, of love, and of nature. His intellectual affinities are with the Lake School of English poets. His view of life and death are transcendental. In his half-pantheistic attitude to nature he is a disciple of Wordsworth, and in his longest poem, “A Vision of Poesy,” there is a rapt mood and an ethereal tone which remind us of Shelley. In his technique and handling of meter, in his idyllic sweetness and human tenderness, he shows the influence of Tennyson. His work as a whole is interesting to the student of comparative literature as an example of the prevailing tendency of Southern poetry to follow, with a considerable time-interval, a line of development parallel with English poetry. The comity of race, language and principles which existed with peculiar closeness between South Carolina and England fully accounts for the

sensitiveness of her writers to the literary standards and traditions of the mother country. There has been no declaration of literary independence in the States of the South.

Timrod has interpreted with insight, delicacy, and enthusiasm the haunting grace and incarnate loveliness of the world of nature. He excels in descriptive and didactic verse in which we see a trace of Wordsworthian simplicity and restraint. He paints nature with intimacy in all her moods, pensive, wrathful, gay, and consoling, and brings out the harmony which exists between her and man. He employs his natural phenomena either to produce orchestral effects or to symbolize human moods. In "Hark to the Shouting Wind" the poet so exults in the turmoil of the elements that he cares not for the blue sky, for

There are thoughts in my breast today
That are not for human speech:
But I hear them in the driving storm
And the roar upon the beach.

Still more subtle is the song "Too Long, Spirit of Storm" with its suggestion of mental stagnation and the death of the soul. In the "Rhapsody of a Southern Winter Night" the poet abandons himself to a mood of reckless bliss "in the long woodland aisles" of the "immemorial pines" and gives his "fancy all it craves,"

Like him who found the west when first he caught
The light that glittered from the world he sought
And furled his sails till dawn should show the land;
While in glad dreams he saw the ambient waves
Go rippling brightly up a golden strand.

These verses reveal much of Timrod's art. Besides showing an historical imagination finer than Rogers, Halleck, or Mrs. Hemans, he composes a sea-piece that ravishes the reader with its music and picturesqueness, and "a sense of joy so wild 'tis almost pain." In his sonnet "Are These Wild Thoughts?" he suggests some-

thing very like the eastern doctrine of prenatal existence or metempsychosis, for the throng of mingled pains and pleasures that sweep through his heart are

Faint memories of far-off times, when
In some strange land, beneath some orient clime
I saw or shared a martyrdom sublime,
And felt a deeper grief than any later woe.

He knew nature as only a genuine lover can, and she reveals herself to him in many guises, in storm and sunshine, gowned in snowy mantle and draped in roses. Spring is his favorite season, and of it he sings with most sweetness and rapture,

Spring with that nameless pathos in the air
Which dwells with all things fair,
Spring with her golden suns and silver rain
Is with us once again.

In the deep heart of every forest tree
The blood is all aglee,
And there's a look about the leafless bowers
As if they dreamed of flowers.

The poet's conception is classical, though intensely local in treatment and romantic in feeling. The poem rises to its emotional climax in this thrilling flush of beauty:

Still there's a sense of blossoms yet unborn
In the sweet airs of morn;
One almost looks to see the very street
Grow purple at his feet.

At times a fragrant breeze comes floating by,
And brings, you know not why,
A feeling as when eager crowds await
Before a palace gate

Some wondrous pageant; and you scarce would start,
If from a beech's heart,
A blue-eyed Dryad, stepping forth, should say,
"Behold me! I am May!"

This is a truly imaginative vision of the rejuvenating principle in nature. The author's inspiration is evidently

drawn from the freshness, fragrance, and rich coloring of spring in South Carolina, but the phenomenon occurs in this State in April. The fault, however, may be laid to the exigency of the rime.

In describing a field of cotton in "Ethnogenesis" an exceedingly felicitous metaphor is employed:

* * * * Many an ample field
Grows white beneath their steps, till now, behold
Its endless sheets unfold
The snow of Southern summers.

Again how daring is the simile in "The Cotton Boll":

The endless field is white,
And the whole landscape glows
For many a shining league away,
With such accumulated light
As Polar lands would flash beneath a tropic day!

In "The Arctic Voyager," a poem in blank verse, Timrod describes the mysteries of the ice-bound world, with its "pathless forests which conceal the bones of perished comrades," and its "sea of open water" which no keel has plowed since earth was made. The noble influence of "Ulysses" is felt in the sentiment of hope and effort:

* * * Whether some strange fate
Shall end us all, I know not; but I know
A lofty hope, if earnestly pursued,
Is its own crown, and never in this life
Is labor wholly fruitless.

"A Vision of Poesy," his longest and most pretentious effort, has a theme somewhat similar to that in Shelley's "Alastor," the quest for an unattainable ideal. Though it is loosely constructed and marked by a juvenile optimism which Timrod never lost, it contains passages of notable power and of rare promise. In setting forth the purpose and destiny of poetry, he shows that her task is and has been "to keep the world forever fresh and young" and "to clothe it with a glory all unseen"; she is the voice of freedom, she lifts men from error, thrills them to action,

hallows all the joys and griefs of earth, sows the germs of art, and ennobles the souls of men. Several passages have, in the light of the author's own life, the deep significance and pathos of a prophecy. Timrod's conception of nature is well summarized in "At Last Beloved Nature," one of his most finished sonnets, in which, though nature responds to every chord of his soul, she does not fully reveal her deepest mysteries to him, but remains

The shadow of a Presence which has passed.

VIII

His Poems on Woman

As the poet of love, the fireside, religion, and the altar, Timrod has done some of his best work. Here he has reached his purest, tenderest, if not his highest note. In these poems inspired by and addressed to women he reveals all the chivalry of his ardent Southern spirit; at the same time there is the utmost delicacy and restraint in the expression of passion. With brain, heart, and will fused into harmonious unison by "the light that lies in woman's eyes," he has sung many a full-throated melody that "the world will not willingly let die." Though his subjects are sometimes trivial the style is never gushing nor slipshod; though they are limited in interest, they are never tawdry. There is more of soul in them than in Moore's sugared strains, less of the flesh than in Swinburne's honied measures. They breathe a flute-like music, and throb with all the pensive pathos, the playful fancy, and tender sweetness of human longing.

In "La Belle Juive," which was addressed to Miss Rachel Lyons, of Columbia, we behold the dark and fascinating beauty of Judah's daughters and hear the rapt music and passion of Miriam's song:

I watch afar the gleaner sweet,
I wake like Boaz in the wheat,
And find you lying at my feet.
My feet! Oh! if the spell that lures
My heart through all these dreams endures,
How soon shall I be stretched at yours!

Henry Austin has called attention to the purity of Timrod, which he says, "is, perhaps, the distinctive quality of his poetry, as of his life." There is not a line which will bring a blush to the cheek of innocence, nor one which any admirer of Timrod would wish to blot.

"The Problem" shows the poet chafing and chiding under the pangs of unrequited love. He had been indulging in the dangerous pastime of conning some maiden over as "a wildering problem," merely matter for his note-book, till—

I awoke as one who had been dreaming in a noonday sun:
With a fever on my forehead, and a throbbing in my brain,
In my soul delirious wishes, in my heart a lasting pain.

Disillusioned, the lover rallies, and asserts himself with manly pride:

If thou thinkest thy place above me, thou shall never stoop to mine,

* * *

With a chaplet on my forehead, I will justify my love,
And perhaps when thou art leaning on some less devoted breast,
Thou shalt murmur, "He was worthier than my blinded spirit guessed."

"Second Love" brings out perfectly the half-serious, half-jesting phase of love's own foolish logic. Its audience will be large, even if limited to those who have been in that embarrassing situation. It has much of the flavor of the old erotic Cavalier poets.

It was, indeed, that early love,
But foretaste of this second one,

* * *

A dear presentiment of thee,
I loved but for thy sake.

And when the twelfth love came, the poet still had reserve arguments to prove that the last was the best, and the fair object the only infallible mistress of the orthodox court of love.

Timrod's three most perfect love poems are "Katie," "Preceptor Amat," and "The Lily Confidante." In the last named he strikes a high, sweet, and pure strain of



*The Monument to Timrod, with Bust by Valentine, Erected
in Washington Square, Charleston, S. C., May 1, 1901*

lyric rapture, so quiet, spiritual, and refined that it seems to hallow passion. Truth and simplicity are here the very subtlest art, and the lover unveils with deft touch at once the nature and eternal mystery of true love and the ineffable charm of pure womanhood. It has all the mellow and haunting grace of a pre-Raphaelite painting. The lover presses his lips close to the lily and whispers the name of a certain maiden, softly lest the listening rose might hear and tell, and asks advice:

Laughing girl, and thoughtful woman,
I am puzzled how to woo—
Shall I praise or pique her, Lily?
Tell me what to do.

And the lily confidante answers:

Silly lover, if thy Lily
Like her sister lilies be,
Thou must woo, if thou wouldst wear her,
With a simple plea.
With a speech as chaste and gentle,
And such meanings as become
Ear of child or ear of angel,
Speak or be thou dumb,
Woo her thus, and she shall give thee
Of her heart the sinless whole,
All the girl within her bosom,
And her woman's soul.

It was Miss Felicia Robinson whose superb beauty and lovely personality had the good fortune to inspire her tutor to write "Preceptor Amat." In this delightful poem one hardly knows what to admire the most—the fine scholarly flow of the splendid lines, the rich-tinted word-painting, or the burning, throbbing sentiment. The young girl flings down upon her teacher's table an armful of lilies and roses and goes out declaring with playful winsomeness that she is going to usurp the office of tutor for the morning. The young man picks up a purple passion-flower—

This one which she touched with her mouth, and let slip
 From her fingers by chance * * * let me shut
 In the blossom that woke it, my folly, and put
 Both away in my bosom—there, in a heart-niche,
 One shall outlive the other—is it hard to tell which?
 * * * It is hard to love thus, yet to seem and to be
 A thing for indifference, faint praise, or cold blame,
 When you long (by the right of deep passion, the claim
 On the loved of the loving at least to be heard)
 To take the white hand, and with glance, touch and word,
 Burn your way to the heart! That her step on the stair?
 Be still thou fond flutterer! * * * How little I care
 For your favorite, see! They are all of them, look!
 On the spot where they fell, and—but here is your book!

The immediate inspiration of several poems was Timrod's sweetheart-wife, Miss Kate Goodwin, whose grace he interprets through the subtle sympathy which exists between human loveliness and the fair face of nature. In the "Dedication Ode" and "An Exotic" he incarnates in the girl the spirit of her native land, and expresses the deep racial sentiment which clasps a million hands and hearts across the sea. "Katie" is one of the best of Timrod's longer poems. It is full of good things—imperishable jewelled lines, sweet rhythmic cadences, fresh pastoral pictures, pastels rich in glowing and golden fancy. It is every word pure poetry winged with passion and imagination.

I meet her on the dusty street,
 And daisies spring about her feet;
 Or, touched to life beneath her tread,
 An English cowslip lifts its head;
 And as to do her grace, rise up
 The primrose and the buttercup! * * *
 She seems to me, go where she will
 An English girl in England still! * * *
 All birds that love the English sky
 Throng round my path when she is by; * * *
 But only when my Katie's voice
 Makes all the listening woods rejoice,
 I hear—with cheeks that flush and pale—
 The passion of the nightingale!

IX

Timrod's War Poems

Timrod has written some beautiful and enduring lyrics on the immemorial charms of woman and of nature, but it is in his wonderful martial and patriotic odes that he has most deeply stirred the hearts of men. Though an ardent lover of peace, he reached his highest range and poetic climacteric in his war-lyrics. Hence his well-earned sobriquet of "The Laureate of the Confederacy." With an impassioned loyalty to his own people at a great historic crisis, he of all Southern poets best voiced their emotions in victorious battle-hymns and plaintive requiems to the slain.

In "Ethnogenesis," which was written during the meeting of the first Confederate Congress in February, 1861, he grandly chants the birth of a new nation—

Hath not the morning dawned with added light?
And shall not evening call another star
Out of the infinite regions of the night,
To mark this day in Heaven? At last we are
A nation among nations.

The poet reaches his highest level of imaginative vision, solid structure, and technical perfection in "The Cotton Boll," a glorious ode in which the real theme is the greatness of the embattled South, armed like Bellona yet desiring peace. The latter note is characteristic of Timrod, and is a point in which he differs most from the pyrotechnic fury of Randall, Ticknor, Koerner, and DeLisle, the author of the "Marseillaise." Next to Lowell's "Commemoration Ode" recited at Harvard in 1865, "The Cotton Boll" is the noblest ode in American literature. It is the voice of the agricultural, commercial, and militant South, of which the poet, invoking the aid of the chorus of sun, stars, clouds, and winds, will

Tell the world that, since the world began,
No fairer land hath fired a poet's lays,
Or given a home to man!

"Carolina," a splendid trumpet call to arms and defiance to the invader, is the most fervid war-lyric in our whole literature, and is a rare success in a difficult field. Henry Austin has asked if it "may not be pronounced superior to any martial Greek poetry now extant," and della Torre has eloquently said, "I must think that if in the long centuries the days shall come when the cause for which Carolinians bled and died shall grow fainter on the ears of distant men, that even in that calm and far-off day, when the agony and strife are long stilled, that agony and strife would live again and the great heart of Carolina would beat once more if, perhaps, some ancient scholar, musing on the record of the past, should read these words:

"I hear a murmur as of waves
That grope their way through sunless caves,
Like bodies struggling in their graves,
Carolina!

"And now it deepens; slow and grand
It swells, as, rolling to the land,
An ocean broke upon thy strand,
Carolina!

"Shout! let it reach the startled Huns,
And roar with all thy festal guns!
It is the answer of thy sons,
Carolina!"

The Legislature of South Carolina has adopted this poem as the State hymn, and it has been set to appropriate music by the late Annie Custiss Burgiss (see *The State*, Columbia March 26, 1911). Emotionally this is the high-water mark of Timrod's poetry. It should never be read except aloud, and it can hardly be sung except standing.

Belonging to this group is the lyric entitled "Charleston," in which is sounded with exquisite rhythm and perfect atmosphere a note of courage and steadfastness to the beleaguered city in its hour of darkest trial. In these quiet, but intense lines, we hear an excellent example of the poet's latent power and emotional restraint:

Calm as that second summer which precedes
The first fall of the snow,
In the broad sunlight of heroic deeds.
The City bides the foe.

As yet, behind their ramparts stern and proud,
Her bolted thunders sleep—
Dark Sumter, like a battlemented cloud,
Looms o'er the solemn deep.

And down the dunes a thousand guns lie couched,
Unseen, beside the flood—
Like tigers in some Orient jungle crouched
That wait and watch for blood.

“Carmen Triumphale” commemorates with joyful dignity the first Confederate victory. The “Ode for Decoration Day in Magnolia Cemetery,” the last of Timrod’s poems which I shall mention, is the most perfect thing of its kind in conception, tone, and technique in our national anthology. It is not only a priceless treasure of American literature but as Professor Trent confidently says, “One need not fear for this once to compare a South Carolina poem with the best lyric of the kind in the literature of the world.” It is a monument more lasting than the pyramids to the soldiers of the South, and the poet’s own best memorial. Just as Bannockburn and Burns’s “Scots wha hae wi’ Wallace bled” are thought and spoken of with pride by every British citizen, so too, through the mellowing influence of the Time-Spirit, is the day surely coming when Timrod’s bugle will share with the sword of Lee our country’s universal plaudits. Such monumental words as these sound as though they had already been carved in marble for a thousand years:

Sleep sweetly in your humble graves,
Sleep, martyrs of a fallen cause;
Though yet no marble column craves
The pilgrim here to pause.

In seeds of laurel in the earth
The blossom of your fame is blown,
And somewhere, waiting for its birth,
The shaft is in the stone!


Stoop, angels, hither from the skies!
There is no holier spot of ground
Than where defeated valor lies,
By mourning beauty crowned!

How fitting it was that the poet who had proudly sung the prologue to the Confederacy in "Ethnogenesis" should have lived long enough to write sadly but with no less pride its epilogue and apotheosis in his "Magnolia Cemetery."







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